3 *The state of identity*

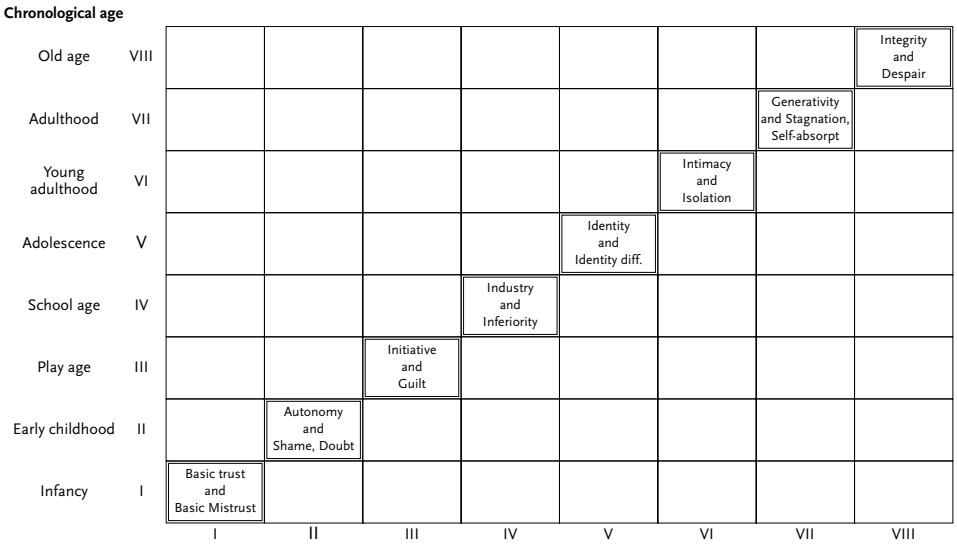
In Chapter One, the quest for personal self-definition has been described as a lifelong endeavor to sustain a sense of personal unity and direction in life within an increasingly diversified and unpredictable social environment. Every now and then, we may find ourselves in a situation that asks for an authentication of our self-view, confronting us with the problem of integrating fragmented and sometimes even contradictory personal experiences and self-projections. In contemporary self-concept approaches, this has mostly been explained as a cognitive task. Inspired by the cognitive revolution, self-psychologists have elaborated people's synthesizing actions mainly in terms of a cognitive organization of self-representations. Unfortunately, by doing so, the subject has been replaced by formalistic information processing models that hardly contribute to our understanding of how people experience threats to their sense of personal unity, continuity, and autonomy, and how such problems of personal self-definition are related to the human condition of everyday life. For a better understanding of such more psychodynamic aspects of self-definition, we have to return to the legacy of Erik Erikson (1950/1963, 1959/1980, 1968, 1982).

Central in Erikson's ideas about personal self-definition is the construct of 'identity'. Although he repeatedly stressed the importance of a coherent configuration of self- and role-images as cognitively scaffolding a basic sense of identity, it is the latter which he considered to play a decisive role. According to Erikson, our conviction to have an identity is based on two simultaneous observations that are deeply rooted in the way we experience ourselves, namely "... the perception of the self-sameness and continuity of one's existence in time and space and the perception of the fact that others recognize one's sameness and continuity." (1968, p. 50). In other words, we tend to perceive ourselves as basically one and the same person over time and across situations, and need to be acknowledged in this quality by our social surroundings. This need for a sense of personal unity is one of the perennial motives of human existence, but one that largely remains hidden. As such, it should not be confused with the formation of an explicit psychosocial identity. Whereas a tacit sense of identity gradually crystallizes over the course of life, identity formation is but one of the developmental tasks in the epigenesis of ego-growth – albeit a crucial one.

According to Erikson, during their lives individuals go through a series of ego-extending crises that are characteristic for the human life cycle (see Fig. 3.1, p. 48). Each crisis can be conceptualized as a transition phase around the dialectical task of achieving a positive synthesis, a proper balance, between formerly unquestioned aspects of the relation between self and world and the emerging realization that this relation may be unfounded. For

example, after toddlers have learned to distinguish themselves from their surroundings and start to realize their vulnerability and dependency as distinctive persons (i.e., the crisis of *autonomy vs. shame*), the stage is set for a next crisis to develop. Now that toddlers gradually start to act on their own, they are confronted with yet another disturbing realization: that others, especially their parents, meet each initiative with approval or disapproval, qualifying each action as 'right' or 'wrong' (*initiative vs. guilt*). The only way for young children to overcome the moral crisis of initiative vs. guilt is to identify themselves with their parents and internalize their values (cf. Kaplan & O'Connor, 1993), which in turn helps them to coordinate their actions in a socially acceptable way. Despite the negative connotation of the term 'crisis' in common parlance, Erikson emphasized that such critical moments should not be regarded as a psychological collapse, but as a temporary disequilibrium that provides favorable conditions for further ego-growth (1968). Each successfully incorporated crisis contributes to a further integration and autonomy of the ego, along with a harmonious participation in a broadening social radius – '...beginning with the dim image of mother...' (Erikson, 1959/1980, p. 59) and ending with the abstract notion of mankind.

Figure 3.1 The epigenetic chart of ego-developing crises over the life cycle



Erikson saw ego-growth as a highly contextualized developmental process, a continuous mutual attunement between individual and society (Graafsma, 1994; Berzonsky, 1990). On the one hand, it arises from "...the growing person's readiness to be driven toward, to be aware of, and to interact with a widening social radius..." (Erikson, 1950/1963, p. 270). On the other hand, society "...tends to be so constituted as to meet and invite this succession of potentialities for interaction and tends to safeguard and encourage the proper rate and the proper sequence of their enfolding."(p. 270). In other words, culture and society provide the epigenetic landscape of likely trajectories, whereas the process of ego-development enables the individual to find one's way through this landscape (Van Geert, 1986b). Within this encompassing epigenetic framework, the identity stage plays a pivotal role. The formation of

a clear-cut psychosocial identity in adolescence implies a first synthesis of specific aspects of the ego with specific aspects in the outside world (Van Geert, 1987). For the first time in the life cycle, individuals are explicitly considering the relation between their inner life and the outside world. Henceforth, individuals will be more apt to invest in efforts to understand themselves in a coherent way, and to arrange their own lives according to a sense of direction for the future.

Much of Erikson's encompassing epigenetic theory of ego-growth has its origins in his psychoanalytic background. The descriptions of the childhood crises of trust, autonomy, initiative, industry, and identity parallel Freud's psychosexually defined crises in respectively the oral, anal, phallic/oedipal, and genital zone[1] (Marcia, 1994). Moreover, in a thorough analysis of Erikson's view on ego-identity, Bourne (1978a) showed that some basic assumptions underlying Erikson's ideas about the developmental role of identity are based on typical psychoanalytical ingredients. Ego-identity is presented as a cumulative attainment after successful resolutions of the preceding ego-crises, as an adaptive accomplishment vis-à-vis the social environment, as an intrapsychic configuration of needs, defenses, and sublimations that structures personality, and as a dynamic integration of self-images that develops in interaction with the social environment.

Yet, at the same time, Erikson's theory is unique in clearly exceeding a traditional psychoanalytic framework. Unlike Freud, Erikson did not consider ego-growth to be accomplished when in adolescence a matured ego takes full command in the steering of a person's actions, feelings, and thoughts. Rather, he saw it as a lifelong process of integrating the psychosocial challenges of the different life phases, stretching from early attachment to the prospect of mortality (Erikson, 1980/1952, 1982). After adolescence, then, there are still some important life-tasks lying ahead. These tasks take the shape of the adult ego-crises of intimacy, generativity, and integrity. Intimacy involves the early adulthood task to enter into intimate relations with others without loosing one's sense of identity. Generativity is the middle adulthood task of taking responsibility for the next generations and contributing to the welfare of others in a productive and creative way, and not to lapse into a state of self-absorption or feelings of stagnation. In the later years of life, finally, ego-development must be accomplished in the knowledge that life is coming to an end. Here, people are confronted with the final task of wholeheartedly identifying themselves with the life that lies behind, at the risk of falling into despair when they cannot reconcile themselves with a life that has proven to be less fortunate.

A further deviation from a strict psychoanalytic framework lies in the emphasis on the subjective functions of identity (Bourne, 1978a; see also Berzonsky, 1990). Firstly, Erikson attributed a central role to more phenomenologically oriented perspectives by speaking of a 'sense of identity' and stressing a coherent self-experience as the key to ego-identity. Secondly, unlike the Freudian ego, this sense of identity is not just an intrapsychic reaction to the tug-of-war between the organic drives and social pressure. Rather, the relation between individual and society is much more a reciprocal one; next to a feeling of inner unity, ego-identity needs social acknowledgement and affirmation to prosper. Finally, as Bourne pointed out, ego-identity implies a way of 'being in the world', because it encompasses a

1 On the understanding that the Eriksonian crisis of industry (and inferiority) in school age parallels the psychosexual latency that Freud observed in this period of life.

sense of meaning in the existential choices that have to be made. Something Bourne did not appear to have realized is the likelihood that Erikson derived these additional ingredients from William James' treatise of the self (1890/1950). As mentioned earlier, Erikson (1968, p. 19) cites James, next to Freud, as his most important source of inspiration for postulating the identity concept. It was the pragmatist James who stressed the importance of experiencing a sense of identity (feelings of continuity and self-sameness), of the social environment as an important source of self-affirmation, and of having a sense of direction in life.

When reading Erikson's work for the first time, one might be struck by its naturalistic, empathic wording. On closer scrutiny, however, the apparent ease of his writings is deceptive. In describing human reality, Erikson does not hesitate to address different levels of human functioning at once. Organic and cognitive maturation, the major psychoanalytic stages, the phenomenology of self-experience and self-reflection, the gradual appropriation of physical and social reality, and sociological and anthropological conditions are all integrated in one encompassing theory of psychosocial development, covering the whole lifespan from birth to death (Allen, 1997; Côté & Levine, 1987; Blasi & Glodis, 1995). It is therefore far from easy to discern the core notions in Erikson's understanding of identity and not loosing the true tenor of his ideas. The fact that Erikson always wanted to hold on to a qualitative analysis of human functioning, while himself not being too meticulous in the strict usage of his own concepts, obstructs such an extraction even further. As Kroger (2000), a former pupil of Erikson, recently observed: "...Erikson defended the multiple meanings he gave to the term [identity] by arguing that the construct of identity can only be made more explicit from a variety of angles; the term, he indicates, must "speak" for itself through this variety of connotations." (p. 9). It is therefore not surprising that the identity literature shows serious controversy about how identity and identity development should be operationalized (cf. Blasi & Glodis, 1995; Berzonsky & Adams, 1999; Bourne, 1978b; Côté & Levine, 1987, 1988a, 1988b; Van Hoof, 1998, 1999; Waterman, 1988, 1999b). More precisely, the identity status approach (e.g. Marcia, 1980; Marcia et al., 1993), as being the dominant research approach in the study of identity development, has been accused of misstating the kernel of Erikson's ideas. From our viewpoint, two fallacies deserve to be mentioned in particular, namely the omission of self-experience as the basis of identity and the improper restriction of identity formation to only the adolescent life phase.

In this chapter, we will go into this controversy in more detail, starting with a short conceptual analysis of the Eriksonian notion of identity crisis in Section 3.1. Section 3.2 will subsequently describe the way in which the identity status approach has tried to operationalize identity formation as a central developmental task in adolescence. We are now in the position to judge whether the accusation of a limited construct validity of the identity status approach has any reason to exist. In Section 3.3, we will side with the criticism that the identity status approach has given priority to the inner logic of its own model and the utility of its measures over an accurate reproduction of Erikson's original ideas. Where Erikson thought of identity formation as an ongoing dialectics between identity and identity confusion, flaring up at times when the individual sees oneself confronted with the necessity of adapting one's personal identity to the challenges of life, the identity status approach initially turned it into a non-recurrent task of making definitive choices in life. This unduly static depiction is somewhat reminiscent of the formalistic way in which self-psychology has

tried to enshrine the dynamics between fragmentation and integration of the self. Section 3.4 will finally conclude this chapter by touching upon a fundamental ambivalence in Erikson's thoughts about the further course of the dialectics of identity formation over the lifespan. From our current knowledge of lifespan development, the question remains how Erikson's understanding of identity as being a subjective answer to the pluralistic conditions of contemporary life can go together with his supposition that further ego-growth follows a strict sequence of ego-crises.

3.1 The Eriksonian identity crisis

In spite of his life cycle formulation of ego-development, Erikson first and foremost earned a reputation as the inventor of the adolescent identity crisis (Côté, 1996a). Erikson described adolescence as the first time in life that the individual is confronted with the polarity between actively acquiring an integrative balance between past experiences and future expectations and the danger of getting stranded in feelings of identity confusion[2].

The adolescent years represent in many respects a psychosocial revolution in the whole of the human life cycle. It is a period that is marked by an accumulation of age-specific changes, extending over all domains of human development. The physical maturation in puberty, the obligation to cope with its sexual implications and to achieve a stable gender role, the acquisition of the faculty to think in abstract and hypothetical terms, and the social instigation to become a trustworthy member of society all come together in one relatively restricted span of time. This confluence of biological, psychological, and social imperatives produces an irreversible break with the familiar, socialization-bound identifications from childhood, turning adolescence into a major transition phase in life. Yet, at the same time, these changes also provides the optimal conditions for an active restoration of a sense of personal coherence (Marcia, 1994). It urges adolescents to actively explore and try out the different alternatives in becoming a person that matters. Consequentially, the developmental task of identity formation is readily recognized in "...the persistent adolescent endeavor to define, overdefine, and redefine themselves and each other in ruthless comparison, while a search for reliable alignments can be recognized in the restless testing of the newest in possibilities and the oldest in values." (Erikson, 1968, p. 87).

Erikson considers identity formation in the first place to be a matter of reflexive imagery. In order to come to a clear self-definition, adolescents, like anyone in the capacity of being a self-reflecting agent, have to give account of the multitude of self- and role-images that may apply to the own person. Each new moment in life, each new setting, and each new perspective conveys yet another image of the person, so that the construction of an integrated self-view, corresponding with the status of having an identity, is anything but a sinecure. By stressing the complexity of this task, Erikson closely followed William James. This is also proven by the next wording, which is reminiscent of the formulations William James once used[3]:

2 In his earlier works (1950/1963, 1959/1980), Erikson interchangeably uses the term 'diffusion' and 'confusion' to denote the developmental antithesis of identity achievement. Later on, however, he dropped 'diffusion' in order to avoid the connotations belonging to the anthropological meaning of diffusion as the spread of cultural elements (see 1968, p. 212).

3 Compare our quotation of James on the different 'empirical selves' in Chapter One, p. 13.

> There are constant and often shocklike transitions between these selves: consider the nude body self in the dark or suddenly exposed in the light; consider the clothed self among friends or in the company of higher-ups or lower-downs; consider the just awakened drowsy self or the one stepping refreshed out of the surf or the one overcome by retching and fainting; the bodily self in sexual excitement or in a rage; the competent self and the impotent one; the one on horseback, the one in the dentist's chair, and the one chained and tortured – by men who also say "I." It takes, indeed, a healthy personality for the "I" to be able to speak out of all these conditions in such a way that at any given moment it can testify to a reasonably coherent self. (Erikson, 1968, p. 217).

For some adolescents, the quest for identity can be so taxing that they succumb to the temptation to contrast rather than synthesize the different alternatives for self-definition. When a state of *identity confusion* becomes symptomatic, further identity development is arrested. It either stagnates in a premature fixation on one of the self-defining alternatives, with the individual magnifying the contradictions between the different possible self-definitions at the expense of their tentativeness. Or it stagnates in an avoidance of choices, resulting in a 'sense of outer isolation' and 'inner vacuum' (Erikson, 1959/1980, p. 133), 'a loss of center and a dispersion' (Erikson, 1968, p. 212). The inability to come to a new synthesis may also lead to a pseudo-resolution, where the individual attempts to counteract the imbalance by oscillating between both extremes (Kaplan & O'Connor, 1993).

Erikson repeatedly pointed out that our modern, western society plays an ambivalent and even aggravating role in the emergence of the adolescent identity crisis (e.g. Erikson, 1950/1963, 1968; Côté, 1996a; Côté & Levine, 1987). Where "...society has the function of guiding and narrowing down the individual's choices..." (Erikson, 1968, p. 87), it has instead created a prolonged institutional moratorium phase between upbringing and a settled adulthood. In this period, adolescents are temporarily released from the obligation to take full responsibility in social life, with ample room to experiment with different roles, orientations, and lifestyles. On an instrumental level, a prolonged moratorium is an inevitable consequence of the organizational and technological complexity of our society. Because our post-industrial society asks for highly versatile participants, the educational period has been extended to adequately prepare youth for the required level of functioning. On an ideological level, such a moratorium complies with the humanistic ethics of individual autonomy. Since the actual choice of one's career and ideology is considered to be the prime responsibility of the individual, our society no longer provides "...clearly defined avenues toward the formation of an adult identity..." (Côté & Levine, 1987, p. 317). So, just when adolescents are confronted with the task to make decisive choices in their lives, our society has created a context of relative anomie. Hence, the 'value gap' that Baumeister (1991) observed between an increased need to make choices in life and the simultaneous lack of clear guidelines – and which he used to explain our present preoccupation with the self – primarily condenses in these formative years. Neubauer (1992, 1994) traces the origins of the adolescent identity crisis to the cultural malaise at the turn of nineteenth century, when the public disorientation about the criteria for a meaningful life grew rampant. Since then, adolescence has become a transition phase that is not only noted for its rebellious behavior (which it has been throughout history), but one that above all is reputed to be "...a time of awkwardness, uncertainty, and indecision". (Baumeister & Muraven, 1996, p. 407).

Nevertheless, even nowadays, most individuals pass through adolescence without impediments. They succeed with more or less effort to actively accomplish a renewed, more

reliable sense of identity that is firmly rooted in social life. According to Erikson, this achievement is twofold (1968). At a manifest level, it implies the construction of a clearly demarcated, flexible *personal* or *self-identity*. It has also been defined as ''...the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of his or her biography...'' (Giddens, 1991, p. 53), or as a 'self-generated theory of self' (Berzonsky, 1990, p. 175). Childhood identifications, self-images, and perceived opportunities for further self-definition are synthesized into an integrated configuration of self-knowledge, which functions to restore a basic sense of unity. On the basis of this synthesized self-view, adolescents are able to make well-considered choices out of the occupational and ideological positions that are available in society. The resulting commitments afford them to give a personal interpretation to socially valid roles, which in the eyes of others affirms their status as autonomous individuals. Yet, because this personal identity is rooted in social reality as it is currently understood, it is only a momentary configuration.

On a more fundamental level, the successful construction of a personal identity adds a decisive strength to an enduring sense of *ego-identity*. The concept of ego-identity is one of the more enigmatic theoretical elements in Erikson's work. Erikson considered ego-identity to be a gradually evolving quality of the ego, finding its full ascendancy in the adolescent identity formation. It is the unconscious attainment of an 'inner capital' (Erikson, 1959/1980, p. 94), accrued from the lifelong confrontations with social reality. It takes the shape of a tacit confidence in one's synthesizing abilities, more specifically in being able to maintain and safeguard personal coherence in life, and to direct one's life towards a tangible future. It is experienced as a sense of psychosocial well-being, and "...its most obvious concomitants are a feeling of being at home in one's body, a sense of "knowing where one is going", and an inner assuredness of anticipated recognition from those who count..." (1959/1980, p. 128; see also 1968, p. 165). In other words, it is a lasting attainment "...which the individual, at the end of adolescence, must have derived from all his preadult experiences in order to be ready for the task of adulthood..." (Erikson, 1959/1980, p. 108). From then on, active self-definition becomes the mark of further personal development. In this sense, adolescence is a 'watershed' (Marcia, 1993a), a pivotal phase (Logan, 1986), between the crises in childhood, which are more global, undifferentiated precursors of the adolescent identity crisis, and the individually fashioned resolutions of the adult crises (Marcia, 1993a; McAdams, 1993; Van Geert, 1987).

For a proper understanding of the process of identity formation, any reference to the interplay between both forms of identity is indispensable. At this point, we may observe another convergence between Erikson and James. Erikson's portrayal of ego, ego-identity, and personal or self-identity is in many ways reminiscent of the Jamesian I/Me-distinction. To shortly recapitulate: according to James, the 'I' stands for the self as a subject, as an active inner agency, whereas the 'Me' refers to the self as object of self-awareness in all its different guises. When we look to the following wording of Erikson, we see a close correspondence with the way in which the ego and self-identity are mutually constitutive within the process of *identity formation:*

> The ego, if understood as a central and partially unconscious organizing agency, must at any given stage of life deal with a changing Self which demands to be synthesized with abandoned and anticipated selves. ... What could consequently be called the *self-identity* emerges from experiences in which temporarily confused selves are successfully reintegrated in an ensemble of roles which also secure social recognition. (1968, p. 211).

Here, the ego, just like the I, refers to the 'synthesizing powers' (p. 211), whereas self-identity, just like the Me, refers to the resulting configuration of self- and role-images and the social recognition that it provides. Moreover, both James and Erikson consider the processes of inner agency to be largely concealed, in contrast with the manifest building stones of the Me or self-identity. This leaves us with the precise conceptual status of ego-identity. The solution lies in a further observation by James. While people have no access to the actual processes that constitute the I, they certainly experience themselves as an I, that is, as a coherent and autonomous agent. This self-experience closely resembles Erikson's definition of ego-identity as the confidence in one's ability to sustain a sense of personal unity and direction in life, making ego-identity above all an experiential quality.

3.2 Operationalizing identity formation: The identity status approach

The identity construct not only pervaded the colloquial speech and cultural agendas in our society, throughout the years it has also generated an extensive body of research (for reviews, c.f. Blasi & Glodis, 1995; Bourne, 1978a; Van Hoof, 1999). Erikson himself was not always pleased with the way in which his conceptualizations were received by the social scientists:

> Social scientists ... sometimes attempt to achieve greater specificity by making such terms as "identity crisis", "self-identity", or "sexual identity" fit whatever more measurable item they are investigating at a given time. For the sake of logical and experimental maneuverability (and in order to keep in good academic company) they try to treat these terms as matters of social roles, personal traits, or conscious self-images, shunning the less manageable and more sinister – which often mean the more vital – implications of the concept. (1968, p. 16).

Erikson reminds us of his original source of inspiration to formulate the construct of identity: his clinical observations with mariners who, through the exigencies of war, have lost a sense of personal unity. It was the same state of confusion that Erikson also saw in adolescents who are at odds with themselves. Only in such a state, "...when inner conditions and outer circumstances combine to aggravate a painful, or elated, "identity-consciousness..." (1968, p. 23), the identity process becomes manifest. However, in view of Erikson's persistent adherence to a naturalistic stance, it is of no surprise that researchers have narrowed themselves down to the conceptual elements that are more open to operationalization (Bourne, 1978a). This is well illustrated by the dominant approach in identity research, the identity status model of James Marcia (e.g. Marcia, 1966, 1980; Marcia et al., 1993).

In the identity status model, the epigenetic dialectics of the Eriksonian identity crisis in adolescence are translated into a classification of four possible outcomes, the so-called identity statuses. Which status applies to an individual depends on two behavioral criteria that according to Marcia constitute the psychosocial task of identity formation (see Figure 3.2, p. 55). The first criterion is that of commitment, that is, whether personal investments with respect to the occupational and ideological (political and religious) positions available in society have been established. The second criterion is whether a period of crisis has occurred (or is occurring at the moment) in which the different occupational and ideological alternatives are subjected to extensive exploration. This way, a distinction could be made between adolescents who already have achieved the optimal status of having established well-founded, self-chosen commitments (*Identity Achievement*), adolescents who have not yet

entered into firm commitments, but are currently engaged in an active exploration of alternatives (*Moratorium*), and the adolescents who are stuck in the unproductive status of blindly holding on to their childhood identifications and parental values (*Foreclosure*), or wandering between the different life-styles and ideological stances rather than exploring them, without any perceptible inclination to settle down to one of them (*Diffusion*[4]).

Figure 3.2: The Identity Status model

		Commitment	
		No	**Yes**
Exploration	**No**	Diffusion	Foreclosure
	Yes	Moratorium	Ident. Achievement

By focusing on the behavioral constituents of identity formation, Marcia intended to make Erikson's rich theoretical notions empirically assessable: "The identity statuses were developed as a methodological device by means of which Erikson's theoretical notions about identity might be subjected to empirical study." (Marcia, 1980, p. 161). It has indeed resulted in a strong and productive research tradition. An important reason for its success was the development of reliable measures to assign an identity status to respondents, based on their reporting of exploration- and commitment-related behaviors (see Marcia et al., 1993). At least 80% of the available data on identity in adolescence were obtained with measures reflecting Marcia's approach (Blasi & Glodis, 1995), in 1993 already covering a body of more than 300 studies (Marcia, 1993b). These measures ranged from a semi-structured Ego Identity Status Interview (e.g. Marcia, 1966, 1967; Marcia & Friedman, 1970; Grotevant, Thorbecke, & Meyer, 1982) and sentence-completion tests (e.g. Marcia, 1966, 1967; Adams & Fitch, 1981; Simmons, 1970), both with extensive scoring manuals, to standardized questionnaires such as the EOM-EIS (e.g. Adams, Shea, & Fitch, 1979; Grotevant & Adams, 1984; Jones & Streitmatter, 1987), and combinations of a semi-structured interview and a standardized questionnaire (Bosma, 1985).

Since its initial formulation by Marcia (1964, 1966), the identity status model has been subjected to several modifications. The original domains of occupation and religious and political ideology have been extended with content areas that were also thought to be relevant for identity formation within our contemporary society, such as the interpersonal and sexual domain (e.g. Archer, 1985; Grotevant et al., 1982; Marcia & Friedman, 1970; Matteson, 1977; Rogow, Marcia & Slugowski, 1983), ethnicity (e.g. Aries & Moorehead, 1989; Phinney, 1990, 1992), and personality characteristics and leisure activities (Bosma, 1985). Also, the relative importance of the separate domains for the overall identity status has received more attention, resulting in studies that use subjective weightings of the domains (e.g. Bilsker, Schiedel & Marcia, 1988; Kroger, 1986; Rogow et al., 1983), or that permit the respondents to freely choose the domains they consider personally relevant (Bosma, 1985). Finally, there has been a somewhat forced attempt to shift from a differential approach to a

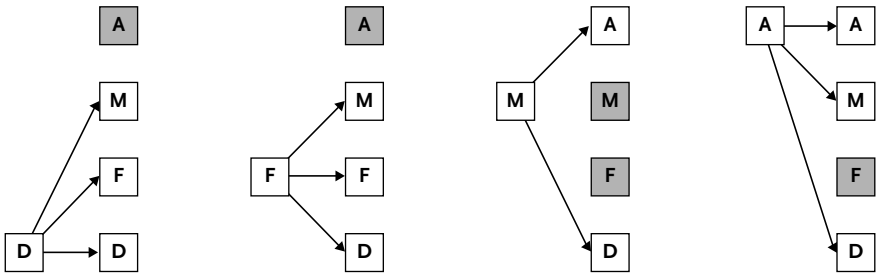
4 Despite Erikson's preference for the label 'identity confusion', Marcia holds on to 'identity diffusion' in order to retain the connotation of 'spread out' in stead of 'mixed up' (Marcia, 1993a, p. 11).

more developmental approach (Marcia, 1993a). This latter modification deserves some closer attention. It shows that the identity status approach does a better job as a differential model – that is, a typology of preferred identity resolutions or identity styles – than as a strong theoretical account of identity development (Berzonsky & Adams, 1999; Côté & Levine, 1988a; Meeus, 1996; Meeus, Iedema, Helsen, & Vollenbergh, 1999; Van Hoof, 1998, 1999; Waterman, 1982, 1993).

Initially, the statuses were described as more or less stable styles of handling the identity crisis, and empirical research was focused on the relationship between the statuses and a wide range of personality characteristics (see Marcia, 1980, 1993b). Nevertheless, the underlying thought was that the statuses actually represent a normative developmental continuum: *Diffusion* ➛ *Foreclosure* ➛ *Moratorium* ➛ *Identity Achieved* (Marcia, 1967). The initial logic behind this order was that it represents a progressive strengthening of ego-synthesis, with *Identity Achieved* as its desired end-state (Côté & Levine, 1988a; Goossens, Marcoen, & Janssen, 1998; Meeus et al., 1999; Waterman, 1982, 1988, 1993). Yet, a growing body of longitudinal studies has demonstrated that this neat picture does not correspond with empirical reality (for overviews, see Kroger, 2000; Meeus, 1996; Meeus et al., 1999; Van Hoof, 1998, 1999; Waterman, 1982, 1993). For instance, Marcia himself (1976) already observed that only fewer than half of the late adolescents and young adults actually attained the status of *Identity Achieved*. An even more compelling finding was that more than half of the subjects indexed as *Moratoriums* or *Identity Achievers* in their late adolescence had to be rated as *Foreclosures* or *Diffused* in their early adulthood, implying that even the subjects who actively invested in a self-construed identity may regress to a state of renewed 'closure' (Valde, 1996).

The occurrence of such anomalous status transitions proved to be so ubiquitous that Waterman (1982, 1993) felt impelled to present a more modest developmental claim. He specified a descriptive model of identity status development that covered almost any of the logically possible transitions; it only precluded a direct jump from *Diffusion* or *Foreclosure* to *Identity Achievement*, a prolonged *Moratorium,* and regressions from *Moratorium* or *Identity Achievement* to *Foreclosure* (see Fig. 3.3, p. 57). The utility of this developmental reformulation rested, according to Waterman, in "...the opportunity it affords to study the relative frequency of the different developmental paths and the circumstances that influence their adoption..." (1982, p. 343; 1993, p. 44). Since then, some extensive longitudinal panel studies have used such a probabilistic approach (Goossens, 1995; Goossens, et al., 1998; Meeus, 1996; Meeus et al., 1999). They indeed established a global trend out of *Diffusion* or *(Fore-) closure* and toward *Identity Achievement*. But this global trend was distributed over a gamut of different developmental pathways, and was complemented by a considerable amount of deviating trajectories, even the ones that are theoretically ruled out by Waterman's model (e.g. A, M ➛ F/C and F/C ➛ A; see also Marcia, 1976). One of the longitudinal studies used repeated measurements with subsequent cohorts of freshmen, the first measurement in the first year of university and the second one at the end (Goossens et al., 1998). The authors had to conclude that a continuous progressive development along the continuum is the exception rather than the rule in identity development. Progressive trajectories in identity formation proved to account only for 25 per cent of the total.

Figure 3.3: A descriptive model of possible identity status transitions (Waterman, 1982, 1993)



A = Identity Achievement; M = Moratorium; F = Foreclosure; D = Identity Diffusion

Apparently, the identity status model has difficulties in exceeding a nomological level of explanation. It is certainly inadequate as a stage model of identity development (Waterman, 1999a; Berzonsky & Adams, 1999). It fails to explain the dynamics of identity development that are responsible for the large inter- and intra-individual variation in status trajectories, especially in relation to the context one is living in (Goossens et al., 1998). Most importantly, it remains unclear what exactly motivates the transition from one status to another. Consequently, it does not predict which status trajectories are spurred by a sense of identity confusion, which trajectories are insensitive to the identity issue, which trajectories contribute to acquiring a firm sense of identity, which trajectories succeed in sustaining it, and which do not.

It is important to note that none of the aforementioned modifications that were meant to enhance the construct validity of the identity status approach from taking into account the subjective relevance of the identity domains to establishing the developmental order of the statuses – has changed its fundamental logic. Identity formation is still presented as a mainly adolescent endeavor in reaction to the developmental changes in puberty and adolescence, which completion is described by four different modes of dealing with the identity crisis according to the actual occurrence of exploration and commitment in the different domains of life. Consequently, the question whether the identity status approach actually represents the Eriksonian process of identity formation has yet to be addressed.

3.3 The limitations of the identity status approach

Despite its methodological merits, Marcia's identity status model has repeatedly been criticized as an inadequate and too restrictive operationalization of Erikson's ideas (Blasi & Glodis, 1995; Bourne, 1978b; Côté & Levine, 1988a, 1988b; Van der Werff, 1985b, 1990; Van Hoof, 1998, 1999). In view of Erikson's multi-layered, descriptive way of conceptualizing identity, such criticism was to be expected. Yet, from our interest in the relation between a search for authentic self-definitions and the need to sustain a sense of identity, two mutually related flaws deserve to be stipulated in particular. The first is the omission of any reference to the subject's self-experience as the basis of identity, and the second the unjustified restriction of identity development to only the adolescent life phase.

Negating the experiential basis of identity

By focusing on exploration and commitment as the behavioral constituents of identity formation, much of Erikson's broad conceptualization of identity has been neglected (Blasi & Glodis, 1995; Bourne, 1978b; Côté & Levine, 1987, 1988a, 1988b; Van Hoof, 1998, 1999). As Côté and Levine (1988a) put it, the identity status model suffers from 'construct underrepresentation' (p. 173). The most crucial omission is the fact that the identity status approach, nor in its conceptual specifications, nor in its measures, makes any functional reference to the subjective experience of identity. For Erikson, the ego's sense of personal sameness and continuity was the 'sine qua non of ego identity' (Côté & Levine, 1987, p. 275). In the identity status approach, however, the researcher assigns a status to respondents on the basis of external criteria, instead of tapping their sense of identity – or more specifically, assessing whether they possess a sufficient degree of personal coherence and social recognition, whether they feel themselves at home in their own body and having a sense of direction in their lives, and whether they are convinced that they can safeguard such feelings and take control over their own lives (cf. Blasi & Glodis, 1995). Moreover, the actual assignment of an identity status is solely based on the actual occurrence of exploration and commitment in content areas that are a priori defined by the researcher (e.g. occupation, and political and religious ideology), instead of letting the respondents indicate the domains that they consider of crucial importance for their identity[5]. Consequently, "What seems to have been frequently lost is the basic question, Who am I? and the idea that identity essentially is a subjective answer to this question." (Blasi & Glodis, 1995, p. 405).

Marcia (1993a) does indeed admit such a reduction, but he argues that it is an inevitable one. He considers the phenomenological aspects of identity, that is, experiencing a sense of identity and its concomitant feelings of personal authenticity, to be too covert to permit objective assessment (see also Marcia, 1979; Waterman, 1988). When researchers would directly try to tap such basic self-experiences, they would run the risk of only obtaining forced and socially desirable answers. Marcia therefore deemed it necessary "...to leave the intrapsychic and phenomenological levels of description and to search for those observable behaviors which could serve as indicators of the presence or absence of the presumed underlying identity structure, knowing that the structure itself would never be observable." (1993a, p. 9). With the underlying identity structure, Marcia refers to the dialectics between a state of confusion resulting from diverging self-definitions as the dystonic pole in ego-identity and their synthesis as the syntonic pole. He considers exploration and commitment to be unequivocal signs that the adolescent is actively progressing towards the syntonic pole. So, then, according to Marcia, why not treat both behaviors as reliable indications that the adolescent participates or has participated in a self-initiated and self-directed process of identity formation? Besides, had not Erikson himself stated that crisis and commitment are necessary conditions for making the kind of existential choices by which one's identity

5 When the pooling of relevant topics is left to the respondents, the number of domains or content areas quickly expands. In an exploratory study of adolescent concerns, Bosma (1985) found the following topics mentioned (in descending order of common involvement): school and occupation, leisure activities, friendships, relationships with parents, politics and societal problems, intimate relationships, religion, self, social interaction, and physical appearance, supplemented by happiness and health, freedom, and money. Given this empirical enumeration, one can hardly think of a topic that can be excluded on forehand as not being a a potentially relevant domain.

becomes firmly embedded in the occupational and ideological structures of society? In other words, are they not the necessary ingredients for a successful transition from the conferred identifications of childhood to the individuation of the societal values and goals of adulthood? The following statement nicely summarizes Marcia's rather straightforward position: "If one 'had an identity' one would have to have commitments in these areas. One who did not have such commitments would be difficult to see as having an identity." (1993a, p. 9).

The casualness with which Marcia equates the criteria of entering into firm commitments with the essence of forming an identity creates the impression of circularity. Blasi and Glodis (1995) therefore hold to their objection that by exclusively focusing on overt, behavioral criteria, Marcia has actually turned the relations between the defining elements of identity upside down. In Erikson's view, exploring the values, norms, and roles of the social environment and identifying with one's choices are just instrumental means that the subject can use to re-establish the real alpha and omega of identity formation, that is, a self-view that is characterized by a sense of personal unity, recognition, and autonomy. Consequently, exploration and commitment should take their relevance to identity formation from the extent in which they contribute to the continuation of a solid sense of identity and provide the individual with a recognizable self-definition (cf. Bosma, 1985; Bourne, 1978a). After all, Erikson considers a breach in the experience of personal unity as the true onset of the identity crisis and as a starting point for identity formation. To diagnose whether the individual has overcome, or still is in such a state of personal confusion, would require a direct assessment of how the individual regards oneself in terms of personal authenticity, sameness, recognizability, and the like. The focus should therefore be on the individual's perception of "... one's own person aimed at capturing what is basic about it; the realization of what is true, real, genuine about oneself, namely, the experience that certain elements are indispensable to the sense of self, while others are marginal and superficial; finally, the subjective experience of unity produced by such a realization..." (Blasi & Glodis, 1995, pp. 406-407). From the perspective of the individual, identity formation revolves around the question whether one is able to find the elements within oneself or in one's life from which one can derive the feeling and recognition (to oneself as to others) to 'be really yourself'.

As long as identity status measures do not address this core-experience, they merely assess decision-making styles with respect to general social issues that, from the viewpoint of sustaining a sense of personal unity, may be rather arbitrary. Or, as Blasi and Glodis put it:

> It is from this experiential perspective that a variety of biographical and emotional elements – concerning, that is, sexual, racial, ethnic, national, cultural, religious, political, and other kinds of affiliation – can become aspects of one's unifying identity. When they are abstracted from their experiential context, from the specific hierarchy of investments and commitments on which each person builds the sense of who he or she is, these elements retain only an uncertain, presumptive, relation with identity. (p. 407).

It is therefore by no means clear that the occurrence of exploration and commitment in a preselected content area necessarily implies the existence of a firm sense of identity (Côté, 1996a). It is for instance quite possible that someone considers a well-respected profession and a firm ideological position a necessary concession to the demands of social life, yet void of any personal significance. Nor does any absence of these behaviors necessarily imply the absence of a functional sense of identity. Marcia (1994), for instance, admits that a

traditionally oriented or rigid environment imposes a social identity on its members rather than that it provides the freedom to construct a self-chosen identity. In such a conformity-oriented society, adhering to conferred commitments without autonomous exploration, that is, the status of foreclosure, would be a very adaptive response, while any individuated choice behavior, indicative of a moratorium status, would be considered inappropriate. In a similar vein, a diffusion-like orientation might protect the individual from too much anxiety in intrinsically unstable environments that are beyond the control of the individual.

The issue whether the identity status approach is a sufficiently valid operationalization of identity formation has generated a heated discussion between the critics of the identity status approach (Côté and Levine, 1988a, 1988b; Van Hoof, 1998, 1999) and some front men in identity status research (Berzonsky & Adams, 1999; Waterman, 1988, 1999b). The criticasters argue that the identity status approach lacks construct validity with respect to the notion of identity, since exploration and commitment only represent a small and atypical part of Erikson's ideas. The advocates of the identity status approach, on the other hand, take side with Marcia by claiming that the identity construct is a hypothetical abstraction that cannot be addressed directly, but must be approximated by use of operational indicators. All the more so, because Erikson's way of describing identity obstructs a systematic decomposition of identity into testable theorems. Berzonsky and Adams, and Waterman therefore follow Cronbach and Meehl (1955) by stating that in such a case a psychometric analysis of the construct validity of the empirical indices (i.e. the statuses) provides a more reliable picture than looking for a conceptual quintessence of the underlying construct (i.e. the identity crisis). Through investigating the discriminant, convergent, and predictive validity of the statuses with respect to a wide variety of related psychological indices, it should then be possible to establish the empirical meaning of the process of identity formation. A more recent handbook by Marcia and other leading figures in identity status research (1993) indeed reviews a considerable body of studies that have validated the conceptual distinction between the four statuses by showing differential correlations with indices of psychosocial and cognitive functioning, personality characteristics, and developmental antecedents and consequences. To name a few: Loevinger's ego stages, moral reasoning, authoritarianism, anxiety, self-esteem, psychiatric problems, relations with parents, family characteristics, conformity, well-being, and cognitive style (c.f. Marcia, 1993b; Waterman, 1999b)

However, circumscribing the empirical meaning of a construct is only one step in showing the construct validity of the operational definitions that are used. It does not free researchers from the obligation to subsequently relate their findings back to the initial connotations of the theoretical construct in order to optimize the fit between theory and observation (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955). The stronger the convergence between both types of meanings, the stronger the construct validity. Unfortunately, a thorough reconsideration of the empirical findings in terms of Erikson's conceptualization of the identity crisis is often lacking in identity status research. Most of the differential variables that are used to validate the statuses only bear a presumptive relation to what actually is at stake in identity formation, whereas the relation with variables that are more endogenous to the notion of identity – in particular the feelings that accompany a sense of identity – are left undiscussed (Blasi & Glodis, 1995; Côté & Levine, 1988b; Van Hoof, 1998, 1999). This is clearly shown by the 1993 handbook on identity status research (Marcia et al., 1993). It only mentions two early studies where identity status scores were related with aspects of ego identity (Marcia, 1966,

1967), and then only with a global index of ego identity, the Ego Identity Incomplete Sentences Blank (EI-ISB). In other words, the psychological differences between the statuses rather than the perceived sense of identity is used as the main criterion of validation. As a result, most of the validation studies that have been carried out were in fact occupied with the internal logic of the model (Côté & Levine, 1988a), mainly demonstrating that the statuses represent different styles of handling the identity crisis (c.f. Berzonsky & Adams, 1999). We therefore tend to agree with Côté and Levine (1988a; see also Van Hoof, 1998, 1999) that the identity status approach has quickly adopted all the characteristics of a relatively independent research paradigm, by the way a conclusion Waterman (1988), one of the advocates of the identity status model, agrees with.

Van der Werff (1985) put his finger on the missing link between Eriksonian identity crisis and the identity status model, when he stated that the identity status model has relegated the quest for identity to making social choices in external and peripheral domains only. Bosma (1985), one of his former associates, tried to adapt the identity status model in a more subjective direction by empirically establishing the amount of exploration and strength of commitments in value areas that the respondents themselves mentioned as the most important ones. Interestingly enough, Bosma found evidence that 'problems with the self' was one of the more important areas for exploration and commitment. More recently, Kroger and Green came to a similar conclusion (1996). They examined the kind of events their adult participants typically reported as the perceived cause of the identity status transitions they went through since adolescence. Kroger and Green distinguished between age-graded events like leaving high school or retirement, history-graded events like World War II, critical life events like death or a divorce, events belonging to the family life cycle like marriage or the last child leaving home, a change of social climate like a relocation, the influence of significant others, internal change, and lack of opportunity. Of all these events, internal change, that is, a discontent or coming to terms with oneself in absence of apparent external influences, appeared disproportionately connected to change into moratorium or identity achievement. This may of course be explained by the fact that Kroger and Green's study has concentrated on subjectively perceived causes of identity change. To Van der Werff, this is exactly a reason to concentrate on self-identification as the central domain of identity formation. This means that exploration and commitment should in the first place concern the individual's attitude towards one's own selfhood, or more precisely, the contradictions and ambiguities that have to be overcome in defining oneself. Consequently, the statuses ought to be distinguished in terms of investments in defining one's own nature, rather than in terms of social investments per se:

> The person by whom these contradictions are passed by, is in the 'foreclosure-status' of self-reflection; the 'moratorium self-knower' cannot stop doubting and wavering about these contrasts. The genuine 'achiever', in this view, is the person who continuously and completely faces his personal contradictions, without losing himself in exploring them, and who restrainedly commits himself to the impossibility to resolve them. (Van der Werff, 1985, p. 468).

This reinterpretation is more in line with Erikson's depiction of the psychodynamic relationship of the individual towards the own person. It retains the dialectical tension between the individual's need to commit oneself to a certain self-view and the need for some tentativeness in becoming the person one wants to be. This is exactly the dynamic quality that is lost in the identity status approach.

Restricting identity development to adolescence

By passing over the experiential aspects of identity, the identity status approach has set the stage for a second fallacy. It unjustifiably restricts identity formation to only the adolescent life phase (Bourne, 1978b; Côté & Levine, 1987, 1988a; Van der Werff, 1990).

By over-accentuating the significance of exploration and commitment for the formation of identity, Marcia has substantivized the dialectical processes that play a role in the consolidation of identity into separate developmental outcomes (Bourne, 1978b; Côté & Levine, 1987). Erikson never used the term 'identity achievement', and he criticized the ease with which others made use of it. His discomfort with this term had to do with its connotation that identity, once established, functions as a rigid 'personality armour' (1968, p. 24), protecting individuals against the precariousness of life. Likewise, he rejected the use of the term 'identity confusion' to indicate a negative developmental outcome, in which individuals fall victim to the centrifugal forces that surround them. Erikson reminds the readers that he coined the terms 'identity' and 'identity confusion' as being the two poles in a lifelong antithesis (Côté & Levine, 1987):

> I was somewhat shocked by the frequency with which not only the term identity, but also the other syntonic psycho-social qualities ascribed by me to various stages, were widely accepted as conscious developmental 'achievements', while certain dystonic stages (such as identity confusion) were to be totally 'overcome' like symptoms of failure. Thus, my emphasis in each stage on a built-in and lifelong antithesis ('identity' v. 'identity confusion') was given a kind of modern Calvinist emphasis. (Erikson, 1979, p. 24).

The substitution of the dialectical tension between identity and identity confusion for a model of four possible outcomes of the adolescent identity crisis creates the impression that once identity is firmly established, the developmental task of identity formation has been resolved for once and for all. This is what Côté and Levine (1987) have called the 'stage-specific notion' of identity development. It corresponds with a concise reading of Erikson's epigenetic diagram where only the diagonal counts (see Fig. 3.1, p. 48). In this quick version, epigenesis is simply described as a step-by-step succession of different developmental tasks, where each life phase is characterized by its own kind of crisis and each successful resolution clears the road for the next crisis to bloom. In this succession, the adolescent identity crisis is just one of the steps, appearing after the school age crisis in perceived competence (industry vs. inferiority) has been resolved and preceding the struggle for intimacy in early adulthood. Though not incorrect, the quick version represents a too narrow interpretation of the dynamics underlying ego-development, in particular that of ego-identity. After all, Erikson explains the principle of epigenesis, as depicted in his diagram, as follows:

> ... the diagram formalizes a progression through time of a differentiation of parts. This indicates that each part exists (below the diagonal) in some form before "its" decisive and critical time normally arrives and remains systematically related to all others so that the whole ensemble depends on the proper development in the proper sequence of each item. Finally, as each part comes to its full ascendance and finds some lasting solution during its stage (on the diagonal) it will also be expected to develop further under the dominance of subsequent ascendancies and most of all, to take its place in the integration of the whole ensemble. (Erikson, 1982,p. 29).

For a comprehensive account of ego-development, then, not only the diagonal of the epigenetic diagram counts, but also the blank cells that make up the rows and columns.

In more recent publications, Marcia (1993a, 1994, 1998) provided us with an extended version of the epigenetic diagram, in which also the blank cells are specified (see Fig. 3.4). It shows that identity formation actually extends over the whole life cycle, just as Erikson intended. First, precursory elements of identity already come into existence in the crises of childhood, because a successful resolution of these crises contributes to the expansion of an early sense of identity into a full ego-identity. For example, a confidence in the ability to maintain a sense of identity is unthinkable without acquiring a sense of basic trust in the first years of life. In the epigenetic diagram, these precursors are represented by the row of cells prior to the identity box on the diagonal. Second, from adolescence onwards, the configuration of self-beliefs that constitute one's personal identity will have to be adapted to the current existential circumstances in order to sustain a basic sense of ego-identity: "...in the stages following the identity stage, the consolidation of ego identity elements arrived at during the identity stage is transformed in ways relevant to issues related to the particular circumstances of the individual's intimacy, generativity, and ego integrity stages, and in response to the exigencies of the social world..." (Côté & Levine, 1987, p. 276). This is shown in Figure 3.4 by the shaded column of cells above the identity box on the diagonal. Côté and Levine called this extended version the 'life cycle notion' of identity formation.

Figure 3.4 The extended epigenetic chart of ego-development over the life cycle

Chronological age		Identity issues							
Old age	VIII	$T\text{-}M_{intg.}$	$A\text{-}S_1D_{intg.}$	$I\text{-}G_{intg.}$	$Ind\text{-}I_{intg.}$	$Id\text{-}ID_{intg.}$	$Int\text{-}Is_{intg.}$	$G\text{-}S_{intg.}$	Integrity and Despair
Adulthood	VII	$T\text{-}M_G$	$A\text{-}S_1D_G$	$I\text{-}G_G$	$Ind\text{-}I_G$	$Id\text{-}ID_G$	$Int\text{-}Is_G$	Generativity and Stagnation, Self-absorpt	$Inty_G$
Young adulthood	VI	$T\text{-}M_{int.}$	$A\text{-}S_1D_{int.}$	$I\text{-}G_{int.}$	$Ind\text{-}I_{int.}$	$Id\text{-}ID_{int.}$	Intimacy and Isolation	$G\text{-}S_{int.}$	$Inty_{int.}$
Adolescence	V	$T\text{-}M_{id.}$	$A\text{-}S_1D_{id.}$	$I\text{-}G_{id.}$	$Ind\text{-}I_{id.}$	Identity and Identity Diff.	$Int\text{-}Is_{id.}$	$G\text{-}S_{id.}$	$Inty_{id.}$
School age	IV	$T\text{-}M_{ind.}$	$A\text{-}S_1D_{ind.}$	$I\text{-}G_{ind.}$	Industry and Inferiority	$Id\text{-}ID_{ind.}$	$Int\text{-}Is_{ind.}$	$G\text{-}S_{ind.}$	$Inty_{ind.}$
Play age	III	$T\text{-}M_i$	$A\text{-}S_1D_1$	Initiative and Guilt	$Ind\text{-}I_I$	$Id\text{-}ID_I$	$Int\text{-}Is_I$	$G\text{-}S_I$	$Inty_I$
Early childhood	II	$T\text{-}M_A$	Autonomy and Shame, Doubt	$I\text{-}G_A$	$Ind\text{-}I_A$	$Id\text{-}ID_A$	$Int\text{-}Is_A$	$G\text{-}S_A$	$Inty_A$
Infancy	I	Basic Trust and Basic Mistrust	$A\text{-}S_1D_T$	$I\text{-}G_T$	$Ind\text{-}I_T$	$Id\text{-}ID_T$	$Int\text{-}Is_T$	$G\text{-}S_T$	$Inty_T$
		I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII

Source: Marcia (1993, 1994)

The life cycle notion of identity development does more justice to Erikson's ideas. Identity should not be understood as a developmental end-state, but as a dynamic feature (Côté & Levine, 1988), or an ongoing, open process in which some flexibility of identity has to be maintained in order to preserve the ability to revise and broaden one's self-view in response to new experiences (Bourne, 1978b). In a basic sense, this also fits Marcia's depiction of identity formation, since exploration and commitment are intentional behaviors that are

oriented towards concrete values, roles, and opportunities provided by the social environment. Given their embeddedness in the social context, firm commitments may have to be weakened and re-evaluated when one's self-perceptions or social situation no longer affirms them. Therefore, "...the firmness and flexibility [of one's personal identity] are not at odds but complement each other." (Bourne, 1978b, p. 390). Both qualities are needed in maintaining what Erikson called a 'favorable ratio' (1963/1950, p. 271) between a sufficiently stable sense of ego identity over a sense of identity confusion.

Yet, how do the quick and the extended version of identity development relate to each other? Again, Van der Werff provides us with a lucid answer: "Thus, seen within a lifespan perspective, the identity achievement of the fifth stage cannot be viewed as more than a first-level achievement, which has been established for the time being." (1990, p. 28). As a consequence, identity researchers and theorists should be more aware that after the adolescent life phase comes to an end, the possibility remains that the changing conditions in one's personal situation might reawaken the issue of identity, even to the point of evoking a full-blown identity crisis (Côté & Levine, 1988). Remarkably enough, it has also been Marcia who, together with his co-authors (Stephen, Fraser, & Marcia, 1992), has recently made such a shift from a stage specific notion to a life cycle notion of identity development. The authors propose a more process-oriented interpretation, where the identity statuses are seen as momentary positions in a lifelong process of identity management. This process should be understood as one that "...operates between the formation and maintenance of structure on the one hand, and its flexibility and openness to change on the other." (p. 296). In this cyclic alternation, being in a moratorium (M) must not taken to be a regression, but a temporary disequilibrium in which an active redefinition of identity takes place (Waterman, 1982, 1993). During this process of personal reconstruction, old self-definitions that have proven to be too rigid must be detached from the personal biography to make room for new, more fitting alternatives. It comes to a temporary conclusion when the individual finds a renewed balance between the consolidation of identity and the prospects for further personal development. Likewise, the state of identity achievement (A) is not a final solution. Instead, every radical change of one's personal situation will invite a repetition of this cycle, hence the term 'MAMA-cycles'. The statuses of foreclosure and diffusion, in turn, represent the polar extremes of respectively rigidity (total consolidation) and lack of definition (total disequilibrium), both having the effect of preventing a fluent redefinition of identity.

In this cyclic reconceptualization of identity formation, a successful resolution of the identity crisis in adolescence no longer implies a permanent completion of identity development. It only means that the adolescent for the first time in life has constructed a personal identity, and has acquired a fundamental ability to protect a basic sense of personal unity that enables one to redefine oneself in a flexible way when the circumstances ask for it:

> ...if the initial identity configuration attained at late adolescence is a self-constructed one, rather than one that has conferred upon the individual, achieved rather than ascribed, successive identity reformulations can be expected throughout the life cycle as the individual meets and resolves the challenges involved in ego growth. Hence, the initial identity, if it is a self-constructed one, is not the last identity... (Marcia, 1994, p. 71).

With this more dialectical reinterpretation, Marcia and his colleagues have brought the

identity status approach more in line with Erikson's original ideas. It not only provides a life cycle notion of identity development, but it also relates the identity statuses – and with that, the behavioral criteria of exploration and commitment – with the foundation of identity formation: safeguarding a sense of identity over the lifespan. Occasional feelings of identity confusion are part and parcel of this dialectical process.

3.4 The dialectics of identity and the path of life

A dialectical view on identity formation, accentuated by the notion of MAMA-cycles, illustrates that identity can be no longer considered to be a developmental outcome that enables the adolescent to become an autonomous adult. Rather, once adolescents have acquired the necessary self-reflexive and social skills to define themselves, identity formation becomes an intrinsic part in the ongoing process of coming to terms with the changing circumstances during the rest of their lives. It is at this point that we are faced with a fundamental ambivalence in Erikson's work. On the one hand, Erikson described present-day identity formation as a relatively open process of psychosocial adjustment. On the other hand, in his epigenetic stage model of ego-development, the specific themes of adult identity formation are totally defined by the ego-crises of the human life cycle. To understand the implications of this ambivalence, let us shortly recapitulate Erikson's analysis of the identity crisis as a psychological reaction to the demands of (late-) modern human existence.

We started this chapter by pointing out that Erikson took ego-growth and identity formation to be a highly contextualized developmental process. On the one hand, culture and society provide the landscape of opportunities and restrictions, while on the other hand the developing individual has to familiarize oneself with the contextual possibilities to find one's own path through life. The phenomenon of the identity crisis must be situated within this dynamic field of tension. The fact that in our present-day society adolescents go through an institutional moratorium demonstrates that the interplay between individual development and the developmental context has become a mixed blessing. Just at the moment that adolescents are making the transition from a relatively protected childhood to the diverging demands of adulthood, the guiding role of the social context has become less compelling. Individuals are more and more expected to define their own trajectory through life on the basis of their personal preferences and convictions, without being able to resort to prefabricated itineraries or passage rites. As a result, simply deriving an identity from conferred parental values or the roles that are prescribed by tradition is no longer a viable solution (Marcia, 1993a, 1994). To ward off a chronic sense of confusion, then, adolescents must learn to actively define and redefine themselves in their own terms in order to fill this developmental vacuum.

An important, but often obscured aspect of the Eriksonian identity crisis is the distinction between ego-identity and personal identity (see Section 3.1). Ego-identity is a lasting, mostly unreflected quality that is only fully acquired after a first, successful resolution of adolescent identity crisis. It can be summarized as the synthesizing ability of the ego to face feelings of uncertainty and confusion and still sustain a basic sense of identity. The main instrument of this synthesizing ability is the construction of a personal identity. Within the diversified and complex social environment we live in, it has become imperative to safeguard a sense of identity through the reflexive integration of possible self-definitions.

A coherent, resilient self-view enables us to take a clear position in social life, and offers the necessary clues to decide which direction our life should take. Given the centrality of a sense of personal continuity, unity, and recognition as the final criterion of identity formation, however, a personal identity is more than a mere action scheme for the future. It is also an expressive self-portrayal that one can identify with and by which one is identified by others. Only this way, we can convince ourselves and others that we have a clear identity at our disposal to which we can appeal to at all times, just as our society demands (see also Slugoski & Ginsburg, 1989; Harré, 1991). So, the construction of a resilient personal identity has an introspective function in trying to achieve clarity about oneself as well as an expressive function in adorning our individuality with socially valued characteristics. As such, it has considerable transactional value in social life.

This transactional value clearly reveals itself in a life cycle reading of identity formation, as proposed by Côté and Levine (1987) and Stephen and colleagues (1992). After all, the notion of MAMA-cycles fits a social reality in which identity can no longer be achieved for once and for all, but must retain a certain degree of flexibility and tentativeness to negotiate changing life conditions (Côté, 1996b; Stephen et al., 1992). Adults who persist in their refusal to face any doubts or uncertainties about themselves may have a hard time to cope with the capriciousness of contemporary daily life. On the other hand, adults who preserve their capability of a certain 'adolescing throughout the life span', as Marcia recently put it (1998, p. 204), will be more likely to review and reorganize their current life in a fitting way. Hence, Baumeister and Muraven (1996) suggest in line with Erikson that identity has become a form of recurring adaptation to the demands of modern life: "Individuals actively choose, alter, and modify their identities based on what will enable them to get along best in that context." (p. 405). Baumeister and Muraven's definition of identity shows that they actually have in mind the construction of a personal identity: "...Identity is a set of meaningful definitions that are ascribed or attached to the self, including social roles, reputation, a structure of values and priorities, and a conception of one's potentialities..." (p. 406).

To employ identity, or more precisely personal identity, as an instrument of negotiation between a basic sense of self and social life requires considerable mental, communicative, and social resources. In this respect, Erikson (1959/1980) once used the metaphor of ego-identity as constituting a kind of inner capital, accrued throughout one's biographical history. Recently, Côté (1996b) elaborated on the analogy of the capital market. Following the sociological diagnosis of Giddens (1991), Gergen (1991), and Gecas and Burke (1995)[6], Côté claims that in a fragmented, late-modern society identity formation has above all become a matter of impression-management, that is, of "...reflexively and strategically fitting oneself into, and maintaining oneself in a community of "strangers" by meeting their approval through the creation of the right impression..." (p. 421). Because people participate in a variegation of changeable social contexts, this requires a recurrent investment in an identity profile that can be exchanged with others, especially when one has to navigate the critical life-passages. Consequently, for a successful identity negotiation, individuals need to have a considerable 'identity capital' at their disposal. Côté mentions two key resources in particular. The first types of assets are the more tangible, socially visible ones that belong to a social identity, such as group memberships, acquired credentials, or a specific appearance

6 See Chapter One, pp. 2-4.

and lifestyle. These identity elements function as 'passports' to the right social circles in order to gain the desired recognition of others, for instance that of being a razor-sharp manager within the world of fast commerce, or that of a 'cool mothafuckah' in street life. The second types of asset are of a more psychological nature. These involve the reflexive and communicative skills to understand and negotiate the diversity of obstacles and opportunities for further self-definition within a given context. Both types of identity assets help the individual to mobilize, redefine, or validate a personal identity that fits the current circumstances.

By taking Erikson's analogy of the capital market to its extremes, Côté has zoomed in on the contextual and transactional mechanisms of identity formation. Côté thus sharpens the contrast between a conceptualization of identity formation as an open and tentative process of self-adjustment and identity formation as totally defined by the sequence of ego-crises that characterize the human life cycle.

This contrast must puzzle every close reader of Erikson, since both standpoints can be recognized in his work. On the one hand, Erikson observed that people must realize their individuality within indefinite social circumstances, with the consequence that transactional aspects of identity – through the construction, adaptation, and negotiation of an explicit personal identity – have become more important in safeguarding a basic sense of identity. Moreover, as recently stressed in sociology and psychology (see Chapter One), this form of personal self-definition has to occur in dialogue with an increasingly fragmented world, with the consequence that flexibility, a unique presentation, and the claim of individuality have become important features in maintaining a sense of identity. This relativistic portrayal of present-day identity formation is, however, at odds with the specific interpretation that Erikson has given to the further course of ego-development over the lifespan. Erikson's view on ego-growth assumes that any healthy developing individual must overcome the identity issues that are defined by the subsequent ego-crises of the human life cycle. A quick glance at his epigenetic diagram indicates that according to Erikson adulthood consists of separate life phases, each with its own kind of existential questions. After the adolescent identity crisis has given rise to the problem of personal self-definition, in young adulthood people are assumed to struggle with an intimacy crisis, in middle adulthood with the generativity crisis, and at old age with the ultimate crisis of ego-integrity. Erikson justified the logical necessity of this strict sequence of ego-crises by claiming that our society, as any viable society, must anticipate the experiential maturation of their participants (1950/1963). Ergo, even though ego-growth is a contextualized development, individuals can only develop into a complete personality on the condition that the problems that the human life cycle present them with are handled in the proper order at the proper time in the proper way.

We are thus forced to conclude that Erikson's view of a lifespan development of identity as an idiosyncratic adaptation to current circumstances contrasts his view of ego-development as prescribed by the epigenetic pathway through the human life cycle. It is a discord between identity formation as an open process of identity negotiation and identity formation as but one of the preparatory steps towards optimal ego-synthesis.

As we will see in the next chapter, it is also a discord between Erikson as a predecessor of contemporary lifespan developmental psychology and Erikson as the representative par excellence of a more classical approach to human development. To overcome this ambiguity, we will take the Eriksonian approach one step further. With the current insights in lifespan

developmental psychology, we will claim that the social embedding of human development, the organic forces of maturation and aging, and the subjective orientation of the individual constitute separate determinants that reciprocally influence each other (Chapter Four). Moreover, within this intricate interplay, experiencing problems with personal self-definition may very well represent a turning point where a supra- and super-individual coordination of development gives way to a personal coordination (Chapter Five). Viewed in this way, the issue of the directionality of identity formation becomes an empirical matter rather than one of theoretical postulation. Granted that people encounter comparable living conditions when they grow older, the adult ego-crises may then reappear as common themes of identity negotiation rather than being indispensable stages in the royal road towards a completed ego-growth.